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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 OTTAWA 003027

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SUBJECT: CANADA: CONSERVATIVES DIVIDED ON MISSILE DEFENSE  
FOR CANADA; GOVERNMENT LIKELY TO AVOID DECISION IN NEAR  
FUTURE

REF: OTTAWA 2990 (NOTAL)

Classified By: POL MC Brian Flora. Reason 1.4 (b), (d), (e).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Despite broad speculation in media and academic circles that the government was poised to take a (positive) decision on Canada's participation in missile defense, PCO Clerk Alex Himelfarb indicated to the Ambassador that the government would seek to avoid a debate and vote on MD anytime soon (reftel/NOTAL). Coincidentally, in a separate meeting the same day (November 8), Conservative Defense Critic Gordon O'Connor voiced his party's (unexpected) reservations on MD to poloffs and DATT; he shared privately his assessment that missile defense is so politically divisive that the minority government will not risk bringing it to a vote. Discussions with House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Bernard Patry, and FAC Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Jim Wright's comments on his MD briefing to the Liberal Caucus bear out the judgment that Parliamentary ignorance and misinformation about missile defense are key factors in Canadian reluctance to make a decision about the program. END SUMMARY.

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION (CONSERVATIVE) NOT CONVINCED MD IS FOR CANADA

12. (C/NF) At Ambassador's request, Poloffs and DATT met with Conservative M.P. Gordon O'Connor, Opposition defense critic, ostensibly to help fill the Opposition's knowledge gap on missile defense. Elected to the Commons for the first time, O'Connor is a retired Army Brigadier General who also worked as a consultant for the PR firm Hill & Knowlton. O'Connor spoke candidly, noting at the outset that he was less concerned with technical details (obtainable from web sites, he said), than with what role the Liberal government is considering for Canada in the missile defense framework. The Opposition wanted to know "what" the government would be signing up for, and "what" will be debated when the issue comes to the Commons floor. In light of the five years the government had worked the issue, O'Connor said, there must be "some kind of arrangement" that the U.S. and Canada had discussed. He added that while he fully appreciates the American view that the threat is increasing over time and the U.S. needs to be prepared, at present he doesn't see a clear benefit to Canada. O'Connor reflected that Canada might be better off sitting it out for now and, if the threat became compelling, perhaps "re-engaging" with the U.S. five or ten years hence.

13. (C/NF) Polmiloff responded that there is no "Agreement" per se at this time. Rather, the Embassy's understanding drawn from the public debate was that in putting missile defense to a vote, the government would seek Parliament's blessing to commit to and negotiate Canadian terms of participation in the program. O'Connor said that the government possesses full authority to negotiate and sign treaties; therefore, in his view, it does not need "permission" to negotiate MD participation. Rather, he agreed with what Defense Minister Graham had said on public radio -- that the government should negotiate a package with the U.S. and present the terms to Parliament for ratification. On delayed Canadian participation, DATT acknowledged that while it was clearly Canada's prerogative, Canadians should be made aware of the opportunity cost of waiting, as the program continues to evolve independently of and without consideration for issues of potential interest/concern to Canada.

14. (C/NF) O'Connor added that he believes there is no/no incentive for the government to bring the issue to a vote at this time. In his estimation, the anti-federalist Bloc Quebecois (54 votes) and left-of-center NDP (19 votes) would "absolutely oppose" any missile defense proposal, and a considerable number of Liberal MPs clearly would like to follow suit. He believes that the Liberals, knowing that a missile defense vote will expose the rifts in the Party, will simply push it further down the road, perhaps even to the next election. Politically, O'Connor said, the issue also was tricky for the Opposition. In essence the Conservatives would like to continue opposing the government without betraying their basic advocacy for strong defense. They see four options if and when the issue comes to the floor:

Support, Oppose, Abstain, Allow the caucus to vote its conscience (a free vote).

15. (C/NF) O'Connor concluded that he did not want to leave the impression that he and the Conservatives do not understand the nature of the post-9/11 threat and the need for a strong, united defense. They take the issue very seriously, he said, and are committed to improving Canada's defenses. But they cannot just fall into line without knowing precisely what the government is proposing and how MD fits in the overall defense picture.

#### HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIR UNSURE WHAT MISSILE DEFENSE IS ABOUT

16. (C/NF) In a meeting on November 4, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Bernard Patry told poloff and visiting WHA/CAN desk officer that he "expected" the missile defense debate to take place in December, with Parliament adjourning on December 12th. Patry said the vote would be non-binding and that the government would brief Parliamentarians in the lead-up to the vote. He added that the likelihood was high that it would be a "free" vote for the Liberal Caucus and that, regardless of the outcome, the government would proceed with the program.

17. (C/NF) Patry said the key concern for him was the potential for "weaponization of space." (NOTE: Rather tellingly, on at least one occasion Patry called the missile defense program the "space weapons program"). He did not know what the involvement of Canada would be, the cost, nor the impact of Canadian participation on NORAD. Patry said that Canada accepts that the U.S. has a clear vision and rationale for the missile defense program and will proceed with it regardless of others' participation: But that doesn't answer the question of whether MD is a "good idea" for Canada.

#### FAC BRIEFING TO THE LIBERAL CAUCUS FURTHER REVEALS KNOWLEDGE GAP

18. (C/NF) Assistant Deputy Minister for Global and Security Policy Jim Wright provided a readout to DCM of his November 30 briefing on missile defense to about 50 Liberal MPs. Wright, whose expertise and grasp of the issue are well known to USG interlocutors at post and in Washington, shared the key points he made:

-- Regarding sovereignty: This is a Canadian decision and always has been; there is no pressure from the U.S. to sign onto missile defense. He argued that "it is an exercise of sovereignty to decide to participate" and it was difficult to imagine Canada not participating on an issue related to North American security.

-- Regarding cost: Level of participation is a matter of choice. Wright said he went into some detail about different levels opted by other countries in response to one MP's rejoinder that Japan had contributed \$25 billion "but they got something for that".

-- Regarding national security interests: Canada's decision should be part of a bigger strategy of prevention (consistent with involvement in PSI and Global Partnership) as well as protection (missile defense). Moreover, MD should be seen as part of a comprehensive security package that includes smart borders, NORAD renewal, and BPG renewal.

19. (C/NF) Wright told DCM that a minority of MPs want it "both ways": protection without paying, and command and control input but no assets on Canada territory. He said he was careful not to raise expectations on industrial opportunities and notions of influence over the U.S. Wright assesses the way ahead to be blurry. The FAC bureaucracy needs a political green light that will only happen once the politicians are comfortable that this is really "their" sovereign decision. Wright said he took some criticism that this briefing was long in coming. He confided that FAC has done "preliminary thinking" of what a framework might look like based on the US-UK agreement. Finally, while there was no green light on briefing other parties yet, Wright thought a decision to go ahead and offer briefings to the opposition caucuses might be made next week.

#### COMMENT

10. (C/NF) From our collective discussions with Canadian interlocutors it is clear that misinformation and plain ignorance about missile defense are factors in the government's inability to move the issue forward. While parliamentary briefings by credible professionals such as Jim Wright can help to de-mystify MD, at this point the issue is so starkly politicized that only time--and perhaps a stronger government--may enable common sense to prevail.

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